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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended for mainstream teachers and school administrators involved in the education of language minority students, and describes professional competencies necessary to capitalize on the linguistic and cultural strengths inherent in a culturally diverse population. The materials included are designed for both training and evaluation of current practice. An introductory section outlines the educational philosophy and principles underlying the booklet's content and intent. The second section provides information that may help in understanding the process and the difficulties of second language acquisition. Section three discusses the role of the teacher and administrator in the process of acculturation, at both social and linguistic levels. The fourth section offers vignettes of a variety of effective teaching techniques and strategies. Some give insight into a teaching moment, and others describe complex and carefully designed programs. Topics include: enriching the study of humanities; using cross-generational interviewing; engaging the student's interest and acceptance; investigation-based science instruction; peer tutoring in a writing center; bringing culturally diverse students together to share experiences; and keeping student attitudes positive. The final section provides a list of questions teachers can ask themselves in evaluating their classroom and teaching style. Contains 28 references. (MSE)

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COMMON COMPETENCIES:

THE PROMISE OF LINGUISTIC / CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Edited by
Margaret Davis
Maryann O'Brien

SEPTEMBER 1990

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COMMON COMPETENCIES:

THE PROMISE OF LINGUISTIC/CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Developed by
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SEPTEMBER 1990

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Editors' Notes

Mainstream teachers and school administrators are the intended audience for this publication. For this reason, we have chosen to avoid the technical terminology used by linguists, multiculturalists, bilingual educators, and researchers in the field of language and cultural studies.

There are descriptors used in this publication, when referring to students whose first language is other than English, that remain unsatisfactory to the editors and to others. Among these terms are language minority and linguistic minority. The semantic connotation of minority implies a less powerful condition for decision-making power and a secondary status in society. A temporary lack of fluency in English (or any second language!) is more appropriately viewed from a developmental perspective. The tremendous potential of these students greatly exceeds the immediate programmatic challenge.

The Bureau of Equity and Language Services is seeking descriptive language that demonstrates respect for children who develop strength in two or more languages and for the contributions made by these children.

....Margaret Davis
....Maryann O'Brien

September 1990

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It is good to know
moon shining on my world
shines on yours.

....Kahoeup Kahn, *Grade 6*

FOREWORD

As we move toward the twenty-first century, it becomes imperative that we reach out and validate the linguistic and cultural realities of language minority students. In Massachusetts, during the past twenty years, we have focused our attention, technical assistance, and training activities toward bilingual and English as a Second Language educators. Massachusetts is a state that implements transitional bilingual education, since language minority students are taught, for the majority of their schooling experience, in a monolingual English classroom. Extensive research vis à vis subtractive (replacing the first language) versus additive (adding a second language) bilingualism, integration versus isolation of language minority students, effects of low academic expectation level for language minority students, and the positive correlation which exists between meaningful parent involvement and student achievement levels, especially with minority students, has enlightened our approach to equitably and fully educating these students.

This publication is meant to be used by all educators throughout the Commonwealth who have the opportunity to be involved in the education of language minority students. The sections entitled **Understanding the Second Language Acquisition Process**, **Embracing Acculturation: A Teacher's Perspective**, **Dynamic Approaches: A Glimpse of the Future**, and **What I Can Do Tomorrow: Connecting with the Future** will help guide educators of language minority students into an empowering methodology which validates and acknowledges the educational needs and contributions of these students.

The vignettes and theoretical framework which are included in this publication will provide you with renewed vision, provocative insights, directed commitment, and a challenge to seize the exciting opportunity in educating language minority students.

Gilman Hébert, *Director*
BUREAU OF EQUITY AND
LANGUAGE SERVICES

Massachusetts
Department of Education

September 1990



I wish I would be
on top of a house.
to see all around

....Valerie Aponte, *Grade 3*

INTRODUCTION

Language minority students constitute a significant and growing percentage of students enrolled in Massachusetts schools. At the present time, one pupil in ten attending Massachusetts public schools has a first language different from English. Students enter our schools speaking over 70 different languages (FY89 Massachusetts Annual School Report). Population trends indicate that the number of language minority students will continue to increase well into the next century.

The presence of students from other cultures who speak a variety of languages enriches our schools and provides an abundance of opportunities for educators. However, few educators at this time have received training in techniques and strategies for working effectively with language minority students. Significant research on productive practices in this field is not generally available to the classroom teacher. This information gap must be addressed if we are to meet the challenges and thereby benefit from the options presented by the demographic reality.

This booklet is written to describe the teacher and administrator competencies which are necessary in order to capitalize on the linguistic and cultural strengths inherent in a diverse student population. The material which follows is intended to provide a guide for training as well as to be of assistance in evaluating the appropriateness of current practice.

The mainstream classroom is the predominant instructional setting for most students for whom English is a second language. While language minority students tend to be concentrated in particular school districts, the need for informed teachers and appropriate materials exists in all districts. The 1984 national report, *Teachers Language Skills Survey*, reported that approximately half of all public school teachers in the United States have current

or previous experience with limited English proficient (LEP) students in their classes. The finding further shows that in general, teachers are not well informed about how to integrate linguistic minority students into their classrooms and about how to provide optimal language input to these children. In addition, few teachers have had the opportunity to develop an understanding of cultural differences in behavior and learning styles. This lack of understanding tends to reinforce cultural stereotypes and to impact teacher/student interaction negatively to the point where learning is impeded.

All students benefit from the same kind of teaching excellence. The commonality of themes regarding recommended practice for second language minority education and recommended practice for mainstream education provides a cohesive framework for teacher training. Disciplines across the educational spectrum are consistent in advocating the following set of principles for enhancing the teaching and learning process for the benefit of all students:

- ☐ The teacher is the critical component in the instructional process.
- ☐ New learning builds on the student's previous experience and prior knowledge.
- ☐ Learning is facilitated by the use of varied instructional practices and materials.
- ☐ Cooperative and collaborative work between students is beneficial.
- ☐ Students are actively involved in their own learning.
- ☐ Students are given ample opportunity to communicate their personal understanding of the subject matter, both orally and in writing.

- ❑ **Assessment is on-going, reflects the variety of knowledge and competencies which the student has developed, and is carried out using a variety of techniques.**
- ❑ **The individual strengths and contributions of each student are recognized, valued, and validated.**
- ❑ **The teacher holds positive expectations that *every* student will succeed.**
- ❑ **The school reaches out to the community for input, participation, and support.**

One is struck by the congruence of the above principles with the following set of principles developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education in collaboration with bilingual, ESL (English as a Second Language) and foreign language teachers from across the Commonwealth (*Principles and Models for Language Development*, 1989):

1. Proficiency in a language develops through using it.
2. Language practice must be functional and meaningful.
3. Classroom organization must allow for interaction between students as well as between teachers and students.
4. Language learning is enhanced when the focus is on doing things with the language rather than on the language structure itself.
5. Language input must be comprehensible to the learner.
6. Language develops through both conscious and subconscious learning experiences.

7. Making errors is a normal and constructive part of the language learning process.
8. Language is learned best in an atmosphere of trust, acceptance, high expectations, and support.
9. The language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing strengthen and reinforce each other.
10. Language does not develop in a cultural void; both the culture of the learner's first language and that of the language being learned influence the progress of language development.
11. Sociocultural factors such as the relationship of the learner's ethnic group to the target language ethnic group can influence language acquisition.
12. Proficiency in the native language facilitates development of a second language.
13. Language proficiency includes linguistic or grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and competence in the use of communication strategies.
14. Language proficiency presupposes different abilities for different people in different situations.
15. Language development takes time.
16. Assessment of language development cannot be done on the basis of a one-time test.

We are in a grieving process over cultural transition,
and we are fearful of losing our language and culture...

I look forward to a bright future,
based on the intelligence I see in our youth.

....*Inupiaq Eskimo*, North Slope, Alaska



UNDERSTANDING THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS

Because English is the standard language of instruction in U.S. schools, it is logical to assume that students placed in mainstream classrooms should be able to speak English as well as to learn through it. This, however, is not always the case. In fact, a majority of language minority students are placed in all-English classes before they are sufficiently proficient in the language. Many are able to converse in English and appear to understand what the teacher and classmates say. Yet they often lag behind native English speakers in academic work, particularly on tasks that require reading, writing, and comprehension. Blame is often directed at these students' families for not using English at home and at programs of bilingual education.

UNDERSTANDING THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS

The second language acquisition process is more complicated than common wisdom suggests.

It seems logical that the more English language minority students hear, the faster they will become proficient in the language. It, therefore, seems to follow that use of languages other than English (whether at home or in school-based instruction) serve to delay or even retard English acquisition. And, because young children appear to learn languages quicker than do older children, adolescents, or adults, it also seems logical that all-English instruction should begin as early as possible. Unfortunately, however, the second language acquisition process is more complicated than common wisdom suggests. Not only is this process ongoing, developmental, and cognitive as well as linguistic in nature, but it is closely tied to students' native language abilities.

*Exposure is not enough....
There are two dimensions to
language proficiency.*

Conversational language proficiency takes about one to two years to develop.

Research demonstrates that there are two underlying dimensions of language proficiency: conversational and academic. Conversational language proficiency is the oral language ability that is acquired through face-to-face interaction with native or near native-like speakers. It is the kind of language that students use to converse informally with classmates or to engage in context-embedded activities. In general, it takes about one to two years to develop. Academic language proficiency, on the other hand, is the ability to participate, comprehend, and succeed in the context-reduced environment of mainstream classrooms. Among other things, this includes literacy skills, problem solving, and skills like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Academic language proficiency can take anywhere from four to eight years to develop.

Most educators presume a direct connection between the ability to speak English and the ability to function in all-English classrooms. Thus when mainstreamed language minority students are unable to perform like native-English speakers, it is thought to be due to factors other than language. While this may sometimes be the case, it is more often due to the not yet fully developed language related ability to process decontextualized academic information in English. However, expectations for these students should not be any less. Educators need to be aware of the ongoing, developmental nature of second language learning.

Teachers often find large discrepancies in the amount of time it takes language minority students to become academically proficient in English and to approximate appropriate age/grade norms on standardized tests. One factor that affects this development is the amount of schooling they have received in their native language.

Numerous studies both in the United States and in Canada have shown a strong correlation between students' academic language proficiency in their native language and academic language proficiency in English. Students who have had formal schooling in their own country and who are literate in this language tend to do better academically in U.S. schools than those language minority students born in the United States and placed in mainstream or quick-exit bilingual classes. This is because academic language proficiency is best developed first in the native language, the language in which concepts are initially formed and the language in which non-native English speakers think. When students are forced to develop these skills in the second language only, it can take as long as nine years for them to academically catch up to native English speakers.

Academic language proficiency can take anywhere from four to eight years to develop.

Academic language proficiency is best developed first in the native language, the language in which concepts are initially formed and the language in which non-native English speakers think.

Unlike 8-12 year olds, children arriving in the U.S. before school age have not had the opportunity to develop a solid academic base in the native language.

Research has also demonstrated a correlation among age, previous schooling, and amount of time to achieve average norms on English achievement tests. Contrary to popular belief, students aged 8-12 upon arrival to the United States and who have had several years of schooling in their native language are the most efficient acquirers of academic English. Studies have shown that these students average five to seven years to approximate age/grade norms. While young children achieve higher levels of oral English proficiency, this same research study found them to average seven to ten years to reach the test norms of native English speakers. This is because, unlike the 8-12 year olds, children arriving in the United States before school-age have not had the opportunity to develop a solid academic base in the native language. Reaching English achievement test norms is the most difficult for adolescents. Although they may have had six or more years of schooling in their own country and be fully literate in the language, they have fewer school years to acquire oral English, to learn how to express in English the knowledge they have acquired in the mother tongue, and to learn the subject matter taught in the United States. And, if academic instruction is conducted only in English, the limited English proficiency of new arrivals will obviously impede the learning rate of this content area knowledge.

The time it takes language minority students to approximate standardized test norms is less when bilingual education is provided.

Studies have found that the amount of time it takes language minority students to approximate standardized test norms is less when bilingual education is provided. Students enrolled in bilingual programs in which quality English as a second language (ESL) instruction was accompanied by native language content area instruction for at least the first three years of schooling, tended to take only three to six years to reach appropriate age/grade norms. This is due, in part, to the fact that academic proficiency, once established, is easily transferable to a second language given sufficient exposure and motivation.

In recent years, a growing number of language minority students have arrived in Massachusetts from rural areas and/or from war-torn countries. Many of these students have had seriously limited or sporadic schooling and, as a result, come with little or no academic-oriented, literacy-based skills in their native language. For these children and young adults, the process of developing academic proficiency in English is a longer and more complicated one. However, as with students who arrive with a strong academic base, the native language should be the initial vehicle through which subject matter is introduced and literacy skills acquired.

Exposure to English is essential to the development of conversational and oral language proficiency.

Exposure to English is essential to the development of conversational or oral language proficiency. This means that language minority students need to be provided with numerous opportunities to socially and linguistically interact with native English speakers. Oral proficiency alone is insufficient for English language academic success. Academic language proficiency, the ability to learn through English, is a slower process and it is closely correlated with academic proficiency (i.e., literacy) in the native language. As such, it is best developed through initial subject matter instruction in the native language with a gradual transition into English instruction. Even after this transition to English content area teaching is made, however, the process of acquiring academic language proficiency in English is still continuing. As a result, students need to be provided with ongoing ESL support and with context-rich, comprehensible mainstream classroom instruction that draws from the student's cultural/experiential knowledge base, and encourages cooperative forms of student interaction. Both content area instruction and literacy instruction should, wherever possible, build upon the linguistic, sociocultural, and academic knowledge and experiences students already have. It is this knowledge that affords the base for students' conceptual understandings, their developing cognitive proficiency, and their understandings of themselves and the social worlds that surround them.

Language is people.
We cannot even conceive of a people without a language,
or a language without a people.
The two are one and the same.
To know one is to know the other.

....Sabine Ulibarri

EMBRACING ACCULTURATION: A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

The following example is a composite piece utilizing components from several cultures, but specific to none.

Gee, how strange! thought Bin to himself. He looked around the crowded but efficiently arranged classroom just as the bell was about to ring. *What should I do? Where should I sit? Who can I ask for help?* And then real panic set in as he realized that he couldn't even figure out who the teacher was! Suddenly, a rather chubby man who seemed a bit older and less stylishly dressed than the others in the room got off the desk where he had been sort of sitting. The man walked up to him and said, *Hi! You must be Ben, the new kid. Wyncha grab a cheya, en'll fill ya in layda.* Bin diverted his eyes in respect as he realized that this must be the teacher. *How strange,* he thought to himself. *In his homeland....*

His face flushed with blood as he reacted to the hurt he felt when he heard that terrible word, *Ben*. Didn't the teacher know that *Ben* was a word rarely uttered in his society? A word that, when spoken, carried terrible consequences for its bearer? For *Ben*, in Bin's native language, meant *low-dog*, one who had broken the mutual rules of gratitude and obligation which held his society together like glue. And what was that strange sequence of sounds coming from 'Dear Honorable Teacher's' lips after that initial clear *Hi!* which he so clearly understood. He remembered *Hi!* from the few Americans he had met when he was being processed for immigration to the U.S. in the border camps. Those sounds weren't like any of the words he had so carefully studied over and over in his beloved book, *First Steps in English*, which had been given to him at the processing center along with his U.S. visa. But Bin bravely bucked up and replied, using another phrase he had heard often

in the last few months, *O.K., Sir!* The older man's brow seemed to furrow a bit, but then he smiled, quickly and easily, and went back up to the front of the room. Bin could see that class was about to begin.



In these few seconds of initial contact between American classroom teacher and newly arrived refugee immigrant lie the potential seeds for future relations between a rapidly growing influx of Limited English Proficient students on one hand, and our already overworked, beleaguered, and rapidly dwindling dedicated teacher corps on the other. *'Dear Honorable Teacher,'* indeed! might the typical secondary or elementary mainstream teacher think, were he or she even to divine the innermost thoughts of the new arrival, who may have successfully overcome the loss of homeland, family, childhood innocence, physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being to win the prize of U.S. immigrant status when so many he left behind had failed. And what is this prize? Freedom from the travails and danger of one continent are replaced by the difficulties of another existence: this one fraught with other challenges, but replete with potential opportunities. What can the teacher do to make the new arrival feel at home, and to foster in each student the best possible chance to realize his or her fullest potential?

Realize that you, as a teacher, have an advantage over the new arrival. Although your ancestors may have come from different lands at another time, your people probably have had time to develop a common code of behavior with members of other groups. The new arrivals are not much different from your own ancestors in seeking a better life in this country. The urgency of their situations, as well as modern levels of social complexity and specialization, create a highly accelerated need for acculturation into mainstream society. Furthermore, many of the new arrivals may come from cultures and societies whose languages, religious philosophies, economic structures, and patterns of behavior bear little or no

apparent resemblance to those with which you may be more familiar and more at ease.

The acculturation process now can be intensified by the recent development of better intervention strategies in the areas of second language acquisition, cross-cultural cognition, and socialization. For example, there is now a better understanding of the need to introduce *real-world* language into language classes, the vital role of getting students to interact socially with their new cultural environment, and the advantages of presenting academic knowledge to students in ways which relate to their own experiences and backgrounds.

Let us now review our initial contact between teacher and immigrant student. On the level of simple human interaction, we can understand those aspects which can lead to personal fulfillment and reduced anxiety by both teacher and student on the one hand, and higher achievement and smoother sociocultural integration by the student, on the other. Even in that brief, almost instantaneous interaction, a variety of linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors operated in a way which paved the way for either mutual fulfillment or mutual frustration.

First, the social level: Immigrants may come from highly hierarchical societies in which the societal status distance between teacher and student may be very different from that of the United States, with its broadly accepted values of social equality among individuals regardless of social or economic status. Consequently, members (teachers and students) of such societies may distinguish themselves from each other by such overt behavior or signs as dress, physical bearing, speech, body language including direction and length of glance, tone of voice, and frequency and degree of verbal response.

The new student may be just as puzzled as you might be by modes of behavior with a commonly accepted significance in one society and a conflicting one in another. What can you as the teacher--older, professionally responsible, comfortable within your own culture--do in

order to achieve a mutual level of understanding with new arrivals? In fact, you may know less about their culture than they do about yours! A simple but profound response to that question is readily available: **ASK; or create a learning environment whereby recognition of the existence of differences allows the student to ask you, the teacher, or to ask other students.** This alone is the single greatest contribution a teacher can make to fostering the achievement and acculturation of the newly arrived student.

Second, **the linguistic level:** Language consists of a number of mutually interdependent systems which provide the means of communication and understanding. These systems, while sharing broad general characteristics which transcend individual cultures, also exhibit culture-bound features which cause problems. Thus, in our initial vignette, the teacher was unaware of the discrepancy between the non-English sound of the student's name and the English transcription (*Bin*). The teacher further altered the student's name by producing a more familiar, approximation (*Ben*). In the teacher's language this change is seemingly insignificant. But it produced a meaningful word of a severely negative nature in the language of the student. Bin did respond, however, with an appropriate level of respect (*O.K. Sir*), given his level of oral English. The teacher, unaware of the intricacy of the interchange, registered some puzzlement. Perhaps he sensed something in the student's averted gaze or too-quick reply, but basically he accepted the student's response.

Finally, the disjunction between spoken and written language and even regional variations within the spoken language can lead to total incomprehensibility (*Wyncha grab a cheya...*). Even so, students often develop a fairly well-functioning social (as opposed to academic) capability in a new language rather quickly (one to two years). Therefore, teachers might be deceived into thinking that those same students have full control over the much more complex academic language components (acquisition of which normally takes four to eight years).

It becomes imperative for the teacher not to assume that silence on the part of the student indicates either acquiescence or full understanding. Rather, you the teacher must take the time to develop ways to bridge any language mismatch and make a connection between the knowledge presented and the human being in your class. Just as the teacher should not be deceived into believing that the students command of basic everyday speech implies full control over abstract written language, so too should the teacher remember that--apart from language and culture--the basic human capacity for thought and understanding is universal. It is risky to assume that a newly arrived student can master all but the most basic aspects of language without a long hard struggle. So too is it dangerous to assume that the student standing before you is cognitively immature and thus that you should lower your expectations. Finding the means of connecting mainstream culture's cognitive achievements (science, mathematics, literature, music, art, history, etc.) with the cognitive CAPACITY of each student is the challenge to the teacher. Good teachers view each student as a potential cognitive equal and social asset, and as a source of information about another world of thought and being. Without finding the key to the student's world, the teacher's expertise in facilitating the learning process is limited. It is crucial that teachers integrate, communicate, and connect with students in ways which personalize and individualize the educational process.

For me, one of the most memorable days in 23 years of teaching is the day the ESL teacher, three peer tutors, and I went into a bilingual U.S. History class and conducted response groups in four languages, as the class worked to prepare NO BORDERS, a stunning multilingual journal about their experiences and views as recent immigrants to this country. Working with linguistic minority students has offered me a phenomenal opportunity to broaden my horizons.

....A Massachusetts high school English teacher



DYNAMIC APPROACHES: A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

This section presents vignettes of effective teachers in action. Some depict a brief moment. Others describe complex and carefully designed programs.

The common thread is caring, creative professionals—teachers who see each student as precious. In each of these examples, students delve into their studies, secure that they are valued and respected as capable contributors in a common quest for knowledge.

Enriching the Study of Humanities

English, Social Studies and Humanities classes can use the culturally diverse backgrounds and experiences of the students to enrich and clarify the understanding of course content for all students. A high school teacher describes the power of such an approach:

My experiences as English and Humanities teacher and literary magazine advisor have convinced me of the importance of including folklore, oral history, and the arts in curriculum. NhuY Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee, was encouraged in class to write about her experiences. Her poem, *Through Their Eyes*, moved her classmates so deeply that they encouraged her to submit it to the literary magazine. NhuY's poem was then chosen to be part of her class' graduation program. (*The poem appears on the inside back cover.*)

In our Humanities class, students are expected to contribute materials about their own lives and cultures, including the many American subcultures. This brings English-speaking students from different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds together (Puerto Rican, Cambodian, Chinese, Haitian, etc.). Suburban and inner-city students have attended one another's religious services to study the relationship between a community and its music. They also have compared their neighborhoods through oral histories and art. Students in bilingual classes work on translating material and bring it to the Humanities class. As a result, all students have heard first-hand about life in India, Iran, Russia, and Vietnam.

An Iranian student's account of his and his mother's forty-eight hour escape on horseback inspired one shy student to read aloud a poem she had written about the recent drowning of a close friend. Students begin to open up, to ask questions of their classmates.

Parents of linguistic minority students also contribute to the education of all children by participating in oral history projects, as guest lecturers and as artists. Expressing feelings and telling of experiences through art forms--dance, mime, painting, music, drama--help

language minority students to communicate many things that are difficult to write or talk about. Though goals in themselves, these art forms also encourage writing and speaking and can accompany written and spoken presentations.

The arts bring out strong feelings and points of view about history and identity that history books in any language are not as likely to evoke. A Jewish student's strong reaction to medieval Christian art and music inspired her to express deep resentment about being in the minority. Her openness and honesty in turn inspired African American students in the class to relate the medieval Jewish and contemporary Jewish experience to the black experience.

Cooperative learning groups examine the arts and history of several specific places in the world: Central America, South Africa, Ulster, Israel, Russia, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Language minority students from these areas are part of the groups. Students share their new knowledge and awareness of one part of the world with the rest of the class. Thus every student contributes to increasing every classmate's awareness.

Cross Generational Interviews

Exploring and validating students' ties to their forebears not only brings recent history to life for students, but also enables them to see themselves as a connected piece of the human experience. Even young children prove to be skillful interviewers, as described by an elementary school teacher:

We listen to a tape of an interview with a grandfather, who is asked disconcertingly direct questions about his experiences as a soldier and as a POW during World War II. I cringe slightly, worried for the grandfather, but he does very well, maintains a level voice and tries to answer the questions reasonably and thoroughly...

We gather in a circle and share interviewing experiences. This is the class that has interviewed and taped the school secretary, who grew up in the area. They also gathered stories from parents and grandparents...

Two first grade classes join for our last meeting. The children are excited about sharing grandparent stories. They stand one at a time and retell or read. One boy shows an illustration of his grandmother cooking beans in a pressure cooker that has exploded, beans flying everywhere. Of course, his classmates love the story...

In a primary classroom, the teacher has become involved in collecting stories from her mother, about herself, and may bring in home movies to share with her students...

The fifth graders want to talk about nursing homes and how scary old people are. They don't want to view a video or listen to a tape. They want to talk about their personal experiences with elders. They want to overcome their fear and they are searching to connect. Annie talks about becoming old like her grandmother someday...

Ongoing evaluation to inform and form instruction is a hallmark of the effective teacher. Even the most reluctant student will respond to a task which builds on prior knowledge and engages that student's interest. A teacher describes a powerful moment:

Curriculum That Fits

I thought about the boy in the back row who had turned his chair to stare out the window when I said, *Take out your pencils*. As I gave directions, the only thing he'd give was an angry glance. Then he noticed that what I wanted was something he could do, and he gave me a chance. He joined in the discussion and even risked an answer and a question. He had been wrong so many times, and yet this time he took a chance.

Investigation-Based Science: The Cheche Konnen Approach

Cheche Konnen is Haitian Creole meaning Search for Knowledge. This name has been appropriately given to an innovative Science/Mathematics program serving urban students representing six different language groups. The critical assumption of the project is that students are intrinsically capable of performing authentic scientific inquiry—an assumption which was borne out by the quality of the students' research:

The *Cheche Konnen* model attempts to bridge the gap between learning science and doing science by placing investigations at the center of science education. The heart of the approach is for students to formulate questions about phenomena for which they have some prior belief: Is our school's water safe to drink? Is the air temperature hottest at noon? Why do we have seasons? Students then build and criticize theories; collect and analyze data; evaluate hypotheses through experimentation, observation, measurement, and simulation; and interpret and communicate their findings.

More than simply involving students in scientific inquiry, it is essential that classrooms evolve into communities in which scientific *sense-making* is actively practiced. Toward this end, investigations are collaborative, as is most authentic scientific activity.

Investigations are interdisciplinary; science, mathematics and language (talk, reading, and writing) are linked intimately. Mathematics and language are recognized as essential tools of scientific inquiry. This approach stands in sharp contrast to traditional schooling whereby science is separated from mathematics, and the role of language in each is hardly acknowledged. Opportunities are created for students to use the languages of science and mathematics in ways that schools and the society at large require: not just to read textbooks, but to write reports, argue a theory, develop evidence, and collaboratively solve problems.

The dilemmas and issues the students meet (e.g., how to explain data, to reconcile data and theory, and draw out

the implications of findings) grow directly out of their own scientific inquiry. Students pose questions, conjecture, theorize, collect and analyze data, and perform experiments. In this context, the purposes of classroom talk and writing shift from ordinary practice, away from transmitting the teacher's meaning system (or the text's) and evaluating the students' mastery of it, toward students' constructing their own meaning of the data and evaluating their own sense-making. They become knowledge producers and active sense-makers, not mere assimilators of knowledge produced or recounted by authoritative others. In fact, through their questions and explorations, the students seek knowledge that neither they nor the teachers already possess.

When teachers experience firsthand what it means to do a project and its impact on students, fears about new approaches give way to enthusiasm:

I had a chance to experience it for myself and I said, 'Wow! What a nice way; learning is fun.' And that's what I did, you know.

Peer Tutoring In a Writing Center

The potential of language minority students can be recognized and realized in new and varied ways whenever these students—alongside their mainstream classmates, not separated from them—are offered approaches that allow expression of every student's individual needs and strengths that inspire cooperative learning and understanding. The following writing center exemplifies one such approach:

When we started the Writing Center four years ago, our aim was to create a place where any student could get help with any writing task. At the Writing Center, *any student* includes some 220 (10% of the student body) in the bilingual program, plus another several hundred for whom English is not the first language.

I was confident that our approach to writing in the Center would be applicable to ESL (English as a Second Language) and bilingual program students, but I didn't know just how. I soon learned, however, when a fellow teacher brought her ESL class to the Writing Center. She quickly had her students writing on the computer, printing out their work, and reading it to peer tutors in the Center. Eventually we took her class and other ESL classes on full-day writing field trips, similar to our training workshops for peer tutors.

Now, ESL students participate in the writing center in numbers proportionate to their representation in the student body. Former ESL students serve as Writing Center tutors, helping both ESL and mainstream students with their writing. ESL and other linguistic minority students profit from the opportunity to do multiple drafts, to read their writing to peers, and to use the word processors in the Writing Center. Like their mainstream peers, they acquire and refine skills in composing, proofreading, revising, listening, and thinking. Moreover, **they share their rich and varied life experiences with each other.** When one of our tutors gave a graduation speech in 1988, she mentioned tutoring a Haitian student as the highlight of her high school experience:

I did not know when I started high school that I would end up salutatorian. I suppose I have succeeded... But the part of my high school experience that stands out the most is not a math class, it is not receiving a science fair award, it is not the time I spent working on a certain paper; it is the interaction I had with a student from another country. That is what education is all about. Education is communication, and appreciation of human potential.

Foreign Exchange Programs-- Next Door

The value of exchange programs in mastering a foreign language has long been recognized. We are fortunate in being able to offer this opportunity to all students--without visas, plane tickets, or host families! A Spanish teacher describes such an exchange:

My stomach twitched with nervousness and excitement, recalled a suburban high school student. It was hard to know what to expect. Here I was, an eleventh grade student with very formed opinions about people I had never been in contact with before. This junior and his classmates, all students in fourth year Spanish classes, were on their way to an urban high school to meet their Hispanic counterparts from the bilingual program for the first time. The students were participants in a collaborative program joining two groups from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds for several days of workshops and a common content-based English as a Second Language and foreign language curriculum to be studied at the home schools.

The program is based on the belief that multicultural and multilingual learning experiences are essential for all students and that the integration of bilingual students with native English speakers benefits both groups equally.

Students from different backgrounds are given the opportunity to explore their own and other cultures by sharing experiences in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Workshops are based on carefully structured activities in Spanish and in English which are designed to foster sharing and cooperation. Some of these activities are introductory ice-breakers and games; interviews; exchange of family histories; cultural exploration through dance, literature, and music; role playing about issues common to all adolescents; and discussions with community leaders. Every participant is both a teacher and a student. All begin to see their own and each other's strengths, and to discover how much we can learn from one another. As one student said, *I was happy to find that I could convey my thoughts in Spanish. I was also*

amazed by the Hispanic students' fluency in English and I admired their bilingual skills.

Bringing students from different backgrounds together to share their experiences is certainly valuable. But this alone will not produce any fundamental changes in their perceptions and attitudes if students have no context for understanding their differences. The curriculum, designed to deepen students' awareness of their own cultural identity as well as that of others, provides such a context. A student summed it up:

This program has given me a new interest in my studies of the Spanish language, as well as opened my eyes to a new culture. The program has not only made me more sensitive to the cultural differences between Anglos and Hispanics, but to other cultures as well. It has taught me that the differences between people of different backgrounds are something we should share with one another because these differences can greatly enrich our lives.

Students go through a process in which they learn to respect and appreciate each other. Consequently, they become able to reach beyond their differences to celebrate their common humanity.

To Help Keep Hope Alive

In the final analysis, an astute and caring teacher is the key to making a school into a place where children can grow. Sadly, many of our students come to us with heavy burdens. A teacher describes one such student:

There is a nice, relaxed feel to the writing lab here. The kids come in, get their disks, and get right to work. They know what to do. There is plenty of coaching and plenty of formal and informal peer reading and response.

In a basic writing workshop for juniors and seniors, the students are finishing up round robin stories, where they write at one terminal for a few minutes and then move on to the next. Toward the end, the teachers put one of the stories up on the wall, right off the computer monitor through the overhead projector. Nice use of the technology. The story is about mud wrestling, and it borders on the risqué. The kids are having a lot of fun, and the teachers are very good-natured about it. When students at any level collaborate on stories and look at each other's work on screen, they do a lot of critical reading. Excellent class!

In that same class I sit with Luc, a Cambodian student. For his initial part in the round robin, Luc has taken an opening line and given it a violent twist: a cop lifts up a blanket, sees a kitten underneath, pulls out his gun, and shoots it. A little girl leans out the window to say, *Hey, that's my cat!* The cop turns and shoots her, too. When I remark on the violence, Luc goes into his computer file and calls up a poem he has written about an old man watering his garden in the sun amidst red birds singing. Suddenly, five swordsmen wearing red bandannas jump over the hedge and, laughing, chop off the old man's head. His family watches in horror, transfixed, afraid to move, the red blood running, the red birds singing. Again I remark on the violence--and power--of the piece.

It's true, he [Luc] says.

And you were there?

*Yes. That was my grandfather watering
his garden.*

Who were these men?

Have you ever heard of the Khmer Rouge?

I ask Luc if I may have a copy of his poem. He gives me printouts of everything in his computer file. Among these is a piece about coming to America, and about his hope for a decent, peaceful life here. I can only marvel at his resilience and remember once again why I am a teacher.

It strikes me that there are *Lucs* everywhere in our schools, of every race and creed, some recently arrived, many who have been here all their lives, many who have endured untold horrors and deprivation and have come to us--so far--with their spirits intact. We are their teachers and their trustees. Is it just my imagination, or is it getting tougher to be a trustee these days? Kids turn to us to help keep hope alive. To whom do *we* turn?

We can improve.

We can keep kids in school longer and achieve a better result. We cannot fail in education. If we fail, we fail our kids and we fail our future.

...Jaime Escalante

WHAT I CAN DO TOMORROW: CONNECTING WITH THE FUTURE

Any teacher who wants to identify ways to improve instruction for linguistic minority students does not have to wait for administrators to restructure curriculum. There are many steps a classroom teacher can take without large scale deviation from the existing curricular objectives of the district. Rather, the classroom teacher can look at the content and work independently and with other teachers to find new ways that students can engage with the material.

The teaching strategies described in the preceding section are all based on the principle that all students will learn best when they are actively engaged in learning, and that they will be actively engaged when:

- ☐ their knowledge is validated,
- ☐ they have the opportunity to participate in decisions about what they will learn,
- ☐ they are responsible for their own learning, and
- ☐ they are highly interested in the material.

This principle of active engagement is even more crucial for linguistic minority students. Language develops out of a real need to use language, and this takes place most effectively when students are actively engaged.

Teachers can begin by evaluating their own classrooms and teaching styles. They should ask themselves the following questions:

- ☐ In class discussions, who does the talking in my classroom? Does the teacher talk for most of the time or do students? To whom are the students talking: the teacher or each other? How does the communication flow? Is it unidirectional, from teacher to student, or multidirectional? Do girls have as many opportunities as boys?
- ☐ Does a Western European point of view dominate the class, or are other points of view considered? Are the experiences and perceptions of students discussed and validated? What biases are present?
- ☐ Does a textbook drive the curriculum? If so, can I, alone or with others, find more creative ways for students to reach the goals of the curriculum? What is missing in the text? Who is missing?
- ☐ What visual displays are present in the classroom? Do they represent various cultures? Is the richness of diversity celebrated?
- ☐ Do I isolate a specific body of knowledge, such as history, from its related subjects, such as the arts, literature, and technology of the period? Would my students benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach?
- ☐ Does everyone in the class, including the teacher, learn from each other? Are you interested in being a learner as well as a teacher?
- ☐ Do students have the opportunity to write extended prose in both first and second language about their thoughts and ideas, and to make sense of the classroom material? Do they have the opportunity to talk through this material with classmates and with the teacher?

- ☐ Is co-operative work a regular part of my students' learning experience? Do I insure that groups are formed in ways which maximize diversity?
- ☐ Would my students' joyfulness in learning be evident to a classroom visitor? Is play utilized as a learning tool?
- ☐ Are linguistic variations acknowledged and respected as valid communication systems in the classroom? Are students gently brought to understand that, while more formal, correct language forms are required in a number of settings, their own natural, informal forms of expression are also powerful?
- ☐ Am I an accessible bridge between the home and the school? How can I devise creative strategies for increasing parents' comfort level in dealing with the school? Do I respect the variety of structures which constitute a family? Do I listen to parents and take their concerns and advice seriously?

These questions address a number of areas, any one of which might be a place to begin tomorrow. The previous section provides some ideas that might give direction to your classroom. You are encouraged to read the material in the bibliography of this document, as well as to seek professional development opportunities in your area.

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Through Their Eyes

They gather in the dark,
And set out for the long journey
No captain, no food, no water
Just an intense desire for freedom in their eyes.

So twenty-five of them start to sail
When the sun sets
Out, to the vast ocean,
the deadly Pacific waves,
the sweltering tropical heat
and the chilly rain
of the open sea.

Through the sad corners of their eyes:
Tears for the ones who are still in chains
Tears for the ones who lie beneath the wild sea
Tears for their hungry children
and for themselves who thirst freedom.

Through the desperate looks of their eyes:
Hopes burst into flame
Hope for solid shore
Hope for peace and nothing more
But an unquarrelsome Vietnam.

Oh please God,
guide the tiny boat.
Oh please Lord,
lead them to shore.

To twenty-four people
who share with me the
four unforgettable days
on the Pacific Ocean and
to any Vietnamese who
still seeks freedom.

....NhuY Nguyen '83

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